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## JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

### **Australia and Vanuatu discuss economic cooperation**

Australian Assistant Defence Minister and Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Alex Hawke MP, and ni-Vanuatu Minister of Finance and Economic Management, Johnny Koanapo, met virtually last week to discuss matters including the countries' close economic partnership and the trial resumption of labour mobility programs, in which up to 170 ni-Vanuatu workers will be temporarily employed on mango farms in the Northern Territory.

Minister Hawke said he hoped the trial resumption would further benefit Australian farmers and the people of Vanuatu, following its suspension due to COVID-19.

"Vanuatu has always been a great partner in the Seasonal Worker Programme and the Pacific Labour Scheme. We look forward to welcoming ni-Vanuatu workers back to Australia," he said.

"This trial is a small but significant step towards the broader resumption of the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme, which bring broad economic benefits to regional Australia and the Pacific," Minister Hawke said.

All workers will need to abide by strict COVID-19 guidelines to protect visitors and the Northern Territory community. The Northern Territory has experienced a very low volume of COVID-19 cases and no community transmission.

Ministers also discussed the challenging global economic circumstances and their impact on the Pacific region, and Minister Koanapo acknowledged Australia's support for Vanuatu's economic response to the pandemic.

"COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on the economies of Australia and Vanuatu. The Government of Vanuatu is grateful for the support it has received from the Australian Government during these difficult times," Minister Koanapo said.

Minister Koanapo discussed the significant impact of Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold on Vanuatu's northern provinces. Minister Hawke reaffirmed that Australia stands ready to assist with the ongoing response to TC Harold, and to work in partnership on the recovery effort.

Minister Koanapo raised the need for critical infrastructure projects in Vanuatu. Minister Hawke said that the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific (AIFFP) will engage closely with Vanuatu on its development priorities.

Minister Koanapo also thanked Australia for joining Vanuatu's recent 40th anniversary of Independence celebrations and for the support of the Australian Defence Force for the occasion.



*Australia's Assistant Defence Minister and Minister for International Development and the Pacific,  
the Honourable Alex Hawke MP.*

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